

# PERSPECTIVES FOR INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENT GENERATIONS AT THE WORKPLACE

**MARIANN MÓRÉ** associate professor  
University of Debrecen  
**ANITA KOZÁK** student  
University of Debrecen

## **Abstract**

In this paper the different definitions of work socialization, the parts of the integration process and the framework of socialization tactics are analysed. We suggest that age of an employee is crucial for the considerations of work socialization.

The literature pays little attention to the differences between generations during the process of work socialization. This paper seeks to examine the difficulties of work integration concerning different generations of employees. It also examines the most important factors in the procedure of work socialization and how it can be carried out auspiciously. General and professional/organizational factors of work socialization have been collected and the importance of the age in the work integration will be analysed.

Quantitative data from an empirical analysis is used for the research. Our questionnaires were completed by 80 employees in the United States of America and in Hungary.

## **1. Introduction**

Recently, the importance of Human Resource Management studies has been growing and one of the key factors of the field is the adaptation of new workforce. Many studies and resources are known about hiring and keeping people and maintaining their loyalty towards the organization. Work socialization is the first step to keep people. Therefore, the significance of integration is evident. However, most of the literature about work socialization focuses primarily on organizational commitment, not on the individuals.

Various perspectives of work socialization have been discussed including socialization stages, guidance, career development, etc. Consequently, many definitions and interpretations of work socialization have emerged. In this essay we focus on the approach of Human Resource Management, but our scope will be expanded to the individual as well. Nowadays, changing workplace for every generation has become a common experience. Consequently, new approaches of work socialization are needed. In this essay we examine the age of employees as a new aspect of work socialization.

## **2. Literature Review and Hypotheses**

### ***2.1. Definitions of work socialization and Hypothesis 1***

A traditional approach (Van Maanen & Schein 1979) defines work socialization as a process by which newly-hired employees learn about, adapt to, and come to identify with the organization. Louis (1980) suggests a process by which an individual comes to appreciate the

values, expected behaviors, and social knowledge for participating as an organizational member. Other scholars (Bauer et al. 1998; Saks & Ashforth 1997) also strongly emphasize the individual's responsibility during the process of learning in order to fit into the organization.

Feldman (1976), Fisher (1986) and Reichers (1987) differentiate four dimensions of learning during work socialization. These four tasks are the following:

- (a) task mastery: learning how to do the components of one's job, needed skills and knowledge,
- (b) learning about the organizational culture, values and goals,
- (c) understanding one's role in the organization (identity, self-image and motives)
- (d) social integration: developing relationships with co-workers, friendships.

Recent definitions also stress the goals of learning. Haueter et al. (2003) and Saks et al. (2007) specify work socialization as a procedure, through which employees acquire information, knowledge on how to adapt to new jobs, roles, work groups and the culture of the organization in order to be a useful member of an organization.

New studies began to examine the interaction between socialization and individualization, but considerably less attention has been given to the differences between newcomers. However, Haueter et al. (2003) suggest that the process is not identical for everyone. A second approach argues that new employees can be differentiated along how much they learn about the following elements of the organizational culture: norms, goals, policies and values; and suggest to differentiate employees how well they develop the interpersonal relationships necessary to function successfully in the organization (Mitus 2006). No literature was found that would make distinctions according to the different age groups in the work socialization. However, Eisenberg et al. (2007), Hammill (2005), and Lancaster and Stillman (2010) examine the differences among generations in terms of motivation, loyalty and expectations.

**HYPOTHESIS 1:** Different generations value differently various general factors that facilitate the integration process at the workplace: (a) patience (b) open door policy (c) empathy (d) free time activities (e) leadership/management support.

## ***2.2. The process of work socialization and Hypothesis 2***

The different definitions of work socialization and the necessary elements of learning during the process have been analysed. Now we will examine the parts of the procedure. There is a well known three-phase work socialization model by Feldman (1986). The three phases are the following:

1. Anticipatory socialization: encompasses all the learning that occurs before a new member joins an organization.
2. Encounter: the new recruit can see what the organization is truly like, some initial shifting of values, skills, and attitudes may occur.
3. Change and acquisition: new recruits master the skills required for jobs, successfully perform their new roles, and make some satisfactory adjustment to their work group's values and norms (Feldman 1986, 310. p.).

To analyse the factors that play a role in the work socialization of a newcomer, Van Maanen and Schein developed a theoretical framework which describes six dimensions of socialization tactics (*Figure 1*). They suggest that the methods of socialization influence the newcomer's role orientation.



<i>Context</i>	Collective	_____	Individual
	Formal	_____	Informal
<i>Content</i>	Sequential	_____	Random
	Fixed	_____	Variable
<i>Social Aspects</i>	Serial	_____	Disjunctive
	Investiture	_____	Divestiture

**Figure 1. Organizational socialization tactics**

(Source: Van Maanen and Schein's organizational socialization tactics [Jones 1986, 263 p.])

Their model depicts a bipolar continuum consisting of institutionalized tactics and individualized tactics. Within these two classifications three subcategories are associated with the socialization tactics; context, content, and social aspects (Cahndi 2005, 2 p.). Institutionalized socialization tactics reflect a more structured and formalized socialization process, while individualized socialization tactics mirror an absence of a structure, namely newcomers are socialized more by default than design (Takeuchi 2009, 2. p.).

They argue that the balance must be found between institutionalized and individualized tactics. We also suggest that the age of new employees during the process of work socialization should be considered.

HYPOTHESIS 2: more experienced/older employees consider less important these interactions at the workplace: (a) feedback (b) professional support (c) the sharing of experiences (d) information about the organization's goals and (e) proper organizational information and communication system than younger employees during the process of work socialization.

**3. Methodology**

We have developed a questionnaire in order to examine the differences between generations at work. This questionnaire consists of 13 questions; each question includes 10 sub-questions. Respondents evaluated each sub-questions with the help of the following scale: 1: not important, 2: somewhat important, 3: important, 4: fairly important, 5: crucial.

One of the 13 questions was about the work socialization. We have differentiated the general and the professional/organizational factors of work socialization. Patience, Open door policy, empathy, free time activities and leadership/management support were general factors. Feedback, professional help and the sharing of experiences are professional factors. Information about the organization's goals and the proper organizational information and communication system are organizational factors.

Questionnaires were distributed to 80 employees in the United States of America and in Hungary. Respondents in Hungary work for an agricultural company; employees in the United States work for a distributor company. Almost two-thirds (59%) of the employees were male, 50% had academic education, all of the respondents worked full time and 41% were in managerial position. The generational distribution of employees was the following: 24% belong to the Y generation (between 18 and 29 years old), 41% belong to the X generation (between 30 and 47 years old) and 35% were Baby Boomers (between 48 and 65 years old).

We employed the methods of descriptive statistics for the demographic variables and we used the one-way analysis of variance and weighted average in order to survey the differences between generations.

## 4. Results

Table 1. shows the results concerning the importance of general factors during the process of work socialization, which examine the Hypotheses 1 (a), 1 (b), 1 (c), 1 (d) and 1 (e) of the study; while Table 2 displays the results concerning the importance of professional/organizational factors during the process of work socialization which analyses the Hypotheses 2 (a), 2 (b), 2 (c), 2 (d) and 2 (e) of the essay.

**Table 1. Results of the importance of general factors during the process of work socialization**  
(Source: own research, 2010)

	Patience	Open door policy	Empathy	Leadership/management support	Free-time activities
Y generation (18–29 years old)	Σ 4,4	Σ 4,51	Σ 3,98	Σ 4,6	Σ 3,56
X generation (30–47 years old)	Σ 3,92	Σ 4,11	Σ 3,69	Σ 4,76	Σ 2,72
Baby Boomer (48–65 years old)	Σ 3,98	Σ 4,22	Σ 3,9	Σ 4,61	Σ 2,92

Highest rates

n: 80

First, as we can see on Table 1, each generation of employees differs in the judgment concerning the general factors. The youngest generation gave the highest score for most of the general factors, except for the leadership/management support. Probably this generation has the least work experience, which means that they need more adjustment efforts than the other two generations of employees.

The results of the importance of free-time activities confirm the findings of one of our earlier researches. We had examined the significance of organizational communicational channels in different groups of age employees before (Kozák 2011). In that study we ascertained that free-time activities (informal programs) are much more important for the younger than for the older employees. It can come from lifestyle and mentality, but also can come from the fact that this generation wants to better adapt to an organization than other age groups of employees. This generation may search its place in the organization during the process of socialization.

The leadership/management support was the most appreciated factor among every age group of employees.



**Table 2. Results concerning the importance of professional/organizational factors during the process of work socialization**

(Source: own research, 2010)

	Feedback	Professional support	Sharing experiences	Info. about the organization's goals	Proper organizational info. and comm. system
Y generation (18–29 years old)	$\Sigma$ 4,5	$\Sigma$ 4,72	$\Sigma$ 4,19	$\Sigma$ 4,14	$\Sigma$ 4,41
X generation (30–47 years old)	$\Sigma$ 4	$\Sigma$ 4,08	$\Sigma$ 3,6	$\Sigma$ 3,86	$\Sigma$ 3,98
Baby Boomer (48–65 years old)	$\Sigma$ 4,07	$\Sigma$ 4,12	$\Sigma$ 3,52	$\Sigma$ 4,07	$\Sigma$ 4,46

Highest rates

n: 80

Secondary, professional/organizational factors were valued more by the youngest group of employees than the other two generational groups. Feedback, professional support and the sharing of experiences are professional factors; information about organizational goals and proper organizational information and communication system are organizational factors.

The evaluation of professional factors also depends on the work experience: younger generations of employees have less work experience than other generations, professional support and the sharing of experience is more fundamental for them. Therefore, it is advisable to mentor young newcomers, while mentoring older generations of newcomers are not necessary in every case (it depends on the scale of work experience in the scope of activities). Instead of guiding this age of newcomers, more information should be given about the organizational goals and activities according to our findings. This is also underpinned by the observation that the oldest generation evaluated higher the organizational factors than the X generation. Probably this older age group of employees requires more information about the organization they work for.

The results did not verify every part of our hypotheses.

**HYPOTHESIS 1:** Different generations value differently various general factors that facilitate the integration process at the workplace:

- Patience: the youngest generation valued more highly the importance of patience than other age groups.
- Open door policy: the youngest generation of employees found patience more important than other age groups of employees, but there were no significant differences in the results.
- Empathy: the youngest generation of employees prefers empathy unlike other generations, but there were no significant differences in the results.
- Leadership/management support: all age groups valued similarly the importance of management/leadership support.
- Free time activities: free-time activities are also considered more important by the younger employees than other generations.

**HYPOTHESIS 2:** more experienced/older employees consider the professional factors of work socialization as less important than other age groups of employees.

- Feedback: the oldest generation of employees does not value feedback as high as other age groups of employees.

- b) Professional support: the oldest generation of employees considers professional support less important than other generations.
- c) The sharing of experiences: the oldest generation of employees had the least scores concerning the importance of the sharing of experience.
- d) Information about the organization's goals: the importance of information about the organizational goals was valued similarly by the different age groups of employees.
- e) Proper organizational information and communication system: the oldest generation evaluated the importance of proper organizational information and communication system more than the other two generations.

## **5. Summary**

The goal of this study was to examine the factors of work socialization in different age groups of employees. The review of the literature shows that there is an extensive literature of work socialization, but we are yet to find works about the differences between generations during the process of work socialization.

The analysis of work socialization has its own practical merits, and this study reveals that different factors are important for each generation during the process of work socialization. Therefore, we should consider the age of newcomers in order to customize our socialization tactics. Younger generations need more professional support and experience-sharing, while older generations need more information about the organization, which means that the process should be differentiated in to suit the needs of different generations. This essay has also pointed out that mentoring older newcomers is not necessary in every case.

In order to sophisticate our research a bigger sample is needed in the future.

To further our research we plan to examine the importance of communicational channels and forms during the process of work socialization. We also intend to discover the other significant differences between generational needs in the process of work socialization.

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